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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM RU GG
SUBJECT: GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT ENDORSES INVESTIGATORY
COMMITTEE REPORT, NOT ALL AGREE

REF: A. TBILISI 2420
1B. TBILISI 2399

¶11. (SBU) Summary: In a unanimous vote of 88 to none on December 19, Georgia's Parliament formally endorsed the report and conclusion presented by the ad-hoc Committee to Investigate August Events (ref A). Parliamentary Speaker David Bakradze spoke highly of the Committee's work. Opposition Vice-Speaker Levan Vepkhvadze publicly expressed hope that the government would implement the report's 12 recommendations, as well as dismay that former Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili was appointed Secretary of the NSC. Some government officials disagreed with the Committee's criticism of their actions. One MP, Jondi Baghaturia, criticized the committee for its "contradictions." Non-parliamentary opposition figures continue to disparage the Committee's work as "biased and untruthful." The Committee's report has already borne fruit, as Committee member MP Dimitry Lortkipanidze plans to introduce a new law covering Georgia's civil defense in Spring 2009. Given the report's reasonable conclusions, the onus is now on the government to address its recommendations.
End Summary.

PARLIAMENT, SPEAKER ENDORSE REPORT

¶12. (U) On December 19, Georgia's Parliament adopted the conclusions of the ad-hoc Committee Investigating August Events (ref A). The vote was unanimous, with 88 in favor and none opposed. Both government and opposition MPs present voted in favor. (Note: Parliament has 138 members; the outstanding 50 were not present for the vote. End note.) Speaker Bakradze praised the Committee's work and said the government was committed to follow the report's recommendations. Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze echoed Bakradze's statement.

OPPOSITION CALL FOR IMPLEMENTATION

¶13. (U) Opposition Vice-Speaker, and Committee member, Levan Vepkhvadze (of the Christian-Democratic Movement) said he hopes the executive branch of government will accept and implement the Committee's recommendations as guidelines in its future work. At the same time, Vepkhvadze said he was dissatisfied that former FM Eka Tkeshelashvili was appointed Secretary of the NSC, because her performance during the war was criticized in the Committee report.

EXECUTIVES DISAGREE WITH CRITICISM

¶14. (U) Executive branch officials, including Minister of Energy Alexandre Khetaguri and head of the Abkhaz government-in-exile Malkhaz Akishbaia both disagreed with the Committee's criticism of their performances. Khetaguri claimed that there were no disruptions in energy supplies during the war. Akishbaia stressed that due to safety

reasons, he could not have physically gone to the Kodori Gorge during the invasion.

SOME OPPOSITION CRITICIZE REPORT AND COMMITTEE

¶5. (SBU) Lone wolf opposition MP Jondi Baghaturia strongly criticized the committee, saying its report is untrustworthy since "it contradicts itself on many issues." Baghaturia argued the Committee "did not study who was responsible for the weak performance of the rear, said nothing on the non-targeted expenditure of Defense funds, and ignored the fact that during the war soldiers abandoned by their commanders had nothing to eat but unripe fruit for 3-4 days."

(Note: Baghaturia was formally a member of the Committee, but refused to participate. End note.) Non-parliamentary opposition politicians have disparaged the Committee and its work since inception. Most claim the Committee was designed to "whitewash" the government's failure in the war. New Rightist Mamuka Katsiadze and Conservative Kakha Kukava (both former MPs who refused to take their seats in Q(both former MPs who refused to take their seats in Parliament in June) said the Committee was biased in its investigation and untruthful in its conclusions.

NEXT STEPS

¶6. (U) Opposition MP and Committee member Dimitry Lortkipanidze (formerly of the United Opposition) was the first to act on the Committee's report. He announced that he plans to introduce a draft law on Georgia's Civil Defense in Parliament's 2009 spring session. Lortkipanidze claimed the report's conclusions showed the weakness of civil defense in Georgia, and the need for a separate structure (to manage evacuations, shelter displaced persons, etc.) Committee

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Chairman Paata Davitaia said he supports Lortkipanidze's initiative.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Public reaction to the report has been varied and watchful; interest remains high. Generally, public sentiment seems to mirror that of the politicians, with most supporting the Committee's integrity and work. We believe that the report draws two justifiable conclusions: the events of August were the result of multiple actions that were initiated much earlier and exploited militarily by Russia; and the Georgian government must now correct their systemic and personnel failures exposed by Russia's invasion. Two clear examples of needed action include Lortkipanidze's law on Civil Defense, and the Christian-Democratic Movement's proposal for a new NSC structure (ref B). The onus is now on the government to address and implement the Committee's recommendations, now and into the future. End Comment.

TEFFT